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## The Democratization of Suffering Through Art Practices

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# THE DEMOCRATIZATION OF SUFFERING THROUGH ART PRACTICES



Lucía Garavito  
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## AGENTS OF VIOLENCE AND TIMELINE

- 1958-82 Transition from political sectarian violence (**Liberals** vs. **Conservatives**) to subversive violence. Proliferation of various **guerrilla** movements (FARC, ELN).
- 1982-96 Political and territorial expansion of the guerrilla movements. Configuration of the **paramilitary** (AUC). **Narcotrafficking** becomes a powerful economic, social and political force. The **State** collapses
- 1996-2005 Intensification of the armed conflict. The State, the guerrilla and the paramilitary radicalize their positions. The nation supports a military solution to the armed conflict. Terrorism.
- 2005-12 Reconfiguration of the armed conflict. The State succeeds in weakening the guerrilla but the guerrilla finds a new way to organize itself. Political negotiations with the paramilitary fail. Narcotrafficking plays a major political, social and economic role in supporting guerrilla organizations and criminal activity at all levels. It corrupts State institutions and political leaders. From 2010-2012, Colombian military killed top FARC leaders in different operations.

2012-2016 Peace talks between the Juan Manuel Santos government and the FARC to discuss ceasefire, victim reparation, courts to impart justice for war crimes, truth commissions, etc. Long, complicated process with numerous advances and drawbacks.

2016 Colombia and the FARC sign a cease fire and disarmament agreement (June) that results in a historic peace accord that brings to an end a 58-year armed conflict.

**In October, a national referendum to confirm the Peace Agreement between the FARC and the Colombian government fails by a very narrow margin.**

**In November a revised Peace Agreement is signed between Colombia and the FARC.**

President Santos wins the Nobel Peace Prize for his "resolute efforts" to bring to an end the longest armed conflict in the region.

- 2017 The FARC cease to exist as a guerrilla movement and convert to a political party.
- 2018-9 Serious difficulties to implement the signed Peace Agreement. Just last week, President Iván Duque objected to some points previously agreed upon by national and international commissions. Duque's position on these issues threatens to jeopardize the whole peace process.

[http://www.centrodememoriahistorica.gov.co/descargas/informes2013/bastaYa/basta-ya-colombia-memorias-deguerra\\_y-dignidad-2016.pdf](http://www.centrodememoriahistorica.gov.co/descargas/informes2013/bastaYa/basta-ya-colombia-memorias-deguerra_y-dignidad-2016.pdf)

## CAUSES OF VIOLENCE IN COLOMBIA

- The **traditional political parties** (Liberals vs. Conservatives) have followed a model of government that favors the **exclusion and disempowerment** of significant sectors of the population (peasants, workers, alternative political groups).
- **Lack of land reform and monopoly of resources.** Land ownership is concentrated in a few hands. The country's economic model has been based on exporting raw materials and extracting natural resources. Each armed group "owns" an economic area.
- **The State is absent** from many regions of the country. Armed groups have become the law in those areas.
- The State does not address consistently the needs of the rural population. Urban centers tend to have priority in the national agenda.

- **Absence of social justice**, opportunities for education, decent housing, health services, protection and safety, especially in the countryside.
- There is a **huge gap** between the haves and the have nots.
- **Narcotrafficking, illegal mining.**

## **HUMAN COST OF THE ARMED CONFLICT (1958-2018)**

- Total of people killed: 262,197
  - 94,754 killed by the paramilitary (AUC)
  - 35,683 killed by the guerrilla (FARC, ELN)
  - 9,804 killed by State Agents (Army, Police)
  - no information available on additional killings
- Of the 262,197 killed:
  - 215,005 were civilians
  - 46,813 were combatants
  - no information available on the remaining cases
- 80,514 people disappeared (70,587 continue disappeared)
- 37,094 individuals were kidnapped.
- 15,687 were victims of sexual violence.



- 17,804 minors were forcibly recruited.
- About 7 million people have been internally displaced in Colombia.

Criminal activities: assaults on municipalities, targeted killings, brutal massacres, terrorist attacks, kidnappings, forced disappearances, sexual assaults, destruction of property, forced recruitment, landmines, extortion, and many others.

<http://www.centrodememoriahistorica.gov.co/noticias/noticias-cmh/262-197-muertos-dejo-el-conflicto-armado>

## HOW HAS THE NATION RESPONDED TO VIOLENCE?

1. **Denial.** “Nothing has happened here.” (*Aquí no ha pasado nada*).  
Official narratives vs. Unofficial narratives.

2. **Cover-ups.** Example: “False positives”.

3. **Sense of unreality.** Researchers in the field report that many Colombians see massacres as “something very removed, very far away from them, practically as something that does not exist.”

4. **Solidarity** has been developing in Colombia but it is a **slow process**. According to Carlo Tognato, it has only accelerated since 2008.

5. Myriam Jimeno questions assumptions about Colombians’ indifference and amnesia regarding violence. She proposes that what has been taking place is the configuration of **emotional communities**, groups where ethics and political action coalesce as victims share their stories with others.

**Why not face violence of such magnitude with growing indignation instead of impunity and indifference?**

# **BASIC POINTS OF THE PEACE AGREEMENT BETWEEN COLOMBIA AND THE FARC**

**(Signed in Havana, June 2016)**

1. Comprehensive rural reform.
2. Political participation for groups that represent different visions and interests in society.
3. Bilateral and definite ceasefire, cessation of hostilities and laying down of arms.
4. Solution to the problem of illicit drugs.
5. Regarding the victims of the conflict: Comprehensive system for truth, justice, reparation and non-repetition.
6. Implementation and verification mechanisms.

<http://www.altocomisionadoparalapaz.gov.co/herramientas/Documents/summary-of-colombias-peace-agreement.pdf>

# **A DIVIDED NATION**

## **Results of the 2016 Peace Referendum**

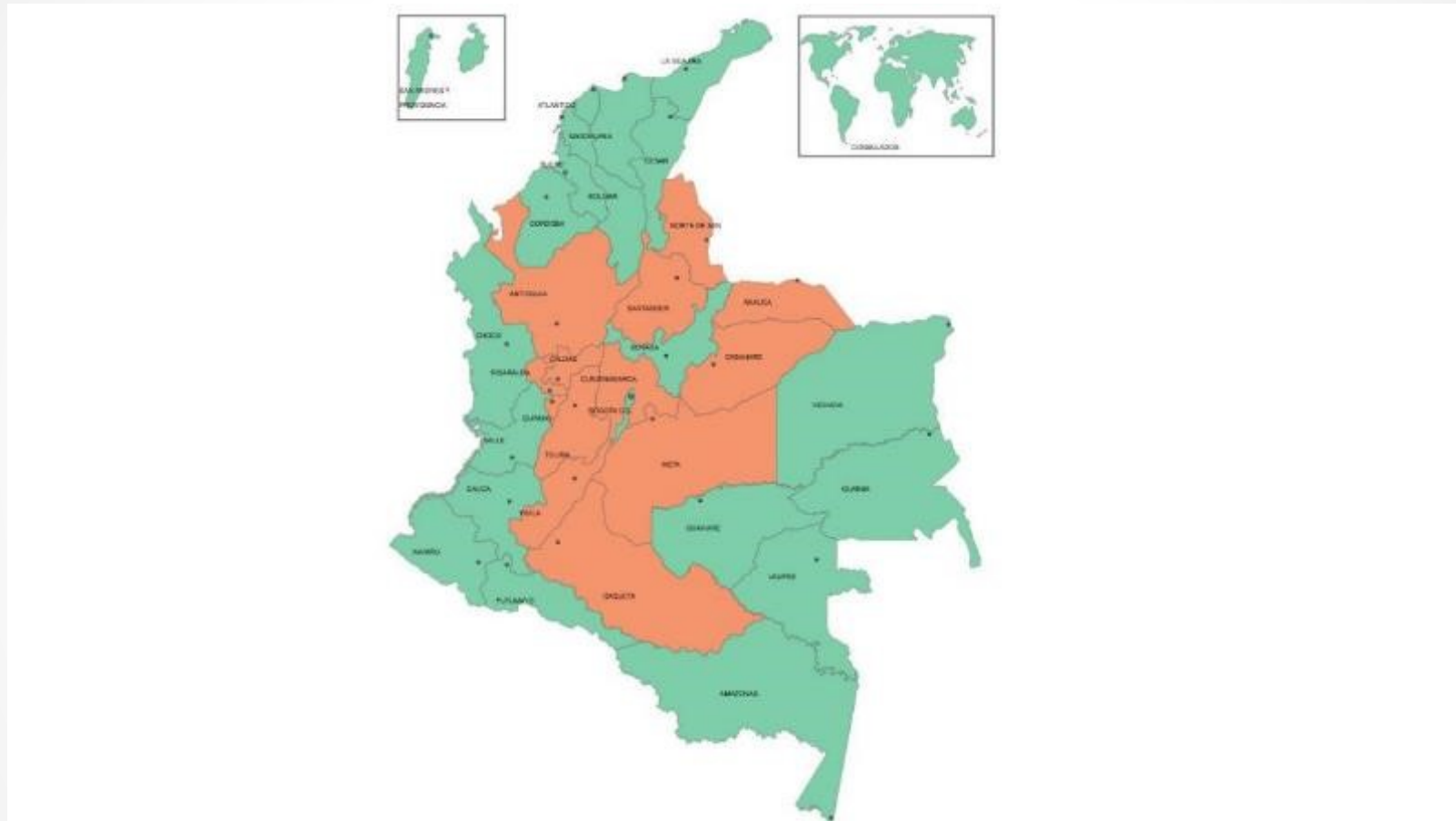
- NO votes: 50.21 % (6,431, 376 votes)
- YES votes: 49.78% (6,377, 482 votes)
- Interesting result:

The YES votes were cast in rural areas that had suffered violence directly while the NO votes were cast in urban areas that had not experienced violence directly. Example: 95.78% of Bojayá voted in favor of the peace agreement with the FARC.

The YES option was supported in 62% of the most underprivileged municipalities.

<https://cnnespanol.cnn.com/2016/10/03/colombia-los-departamentos-con-mas-victimas-votaron-mayoritariamente-si-en-el-plebiscito/>

## REFERENDUM RESULTS Yes-No (2016)



<https://cnnespanol.cnn.com/2016/10/03/colombia-los-departamentos-con-mas-victimas-votaron-mayoritariamente-si-en-el-plebiscito/>

# THE DEMOCRATIZATION OF SUFFERING THROUGH ART PRACTICES

## **Cultural Trauma Theory.**

Crimes of a significant magnitude may fail to maintain resonance in a wider context because of the lack of social actors to integrate them into a cultural trauma process through their “resources, authority and interpretive competence.” (Jeffrey C. Alexander)

## **Art as a carrier for cultural trauma.**

Artistic manifestations are collective agents embedded in the social system that formulate, assign meaning and propagate symbolic representations of events.

Alexander, Jeffrey C. and Elizabeth Butler Breese. “Introduction: On Social Suffering and Its Cultural Construction.” In *Narrating Trauma: On the Impact of Collective Suffering*, edited by Ron Eyerman et al. Boulder: Paradigm Publishers, 2013.

In doing so they may transform devastating individual physical and/or psychological experiences into a cultural trauma that inscribes the loss of identity and the fragmentation of a given community into collective memory.

In the context of Colombia, artistic practices have played a significant role in democratizing and making visible the suffering of invisible (ignored) territories, individuals and communities that have been subjected to the violence of the armed conflict.

In addition to historians and academic researchers, playwrights and theater practitioners, painters, sculptors, photographers, cartoonists and musicians have actively engaged through their work as agents of cultural trauma. They aim to configure a collective history that incorporates the painful experience of victims during decades of profound loss, devastation, and hopelessness.

I will focus on illustrating how this process takes shape in five cases:

- The work of Libia Posada captures the so-called “cartography of terror” (Daniel Pécaut, sociologist).
- *Shrouds* (Sudarios) by Erika Diettes, is a public display of profound personal loss.

- Quilts that narrate the massacre that took place in the town of Mampuján.
- *Fragments* (Fragmentos), a counter-monument by Doris Salcedo.
- A series of twelve paintings by an ex-guerrilla FARC member, Inty Maleywa.
- *Memories in Color*, an initiative by Edwin Rodríguez.

All of them may be considered an expression and a step forward in the practice of **participative democracy**. The 1991 Constitution adds **participative democracy** to the already existing category of **representative democracy**. It is supposed to give citizens legal tools to be part of the nation's decision making process in matters of public interest and to defend their rights. It provides new spaces, institutions, and legal frameworks to encourage social cohesion, discussion, and formulation of public policies.

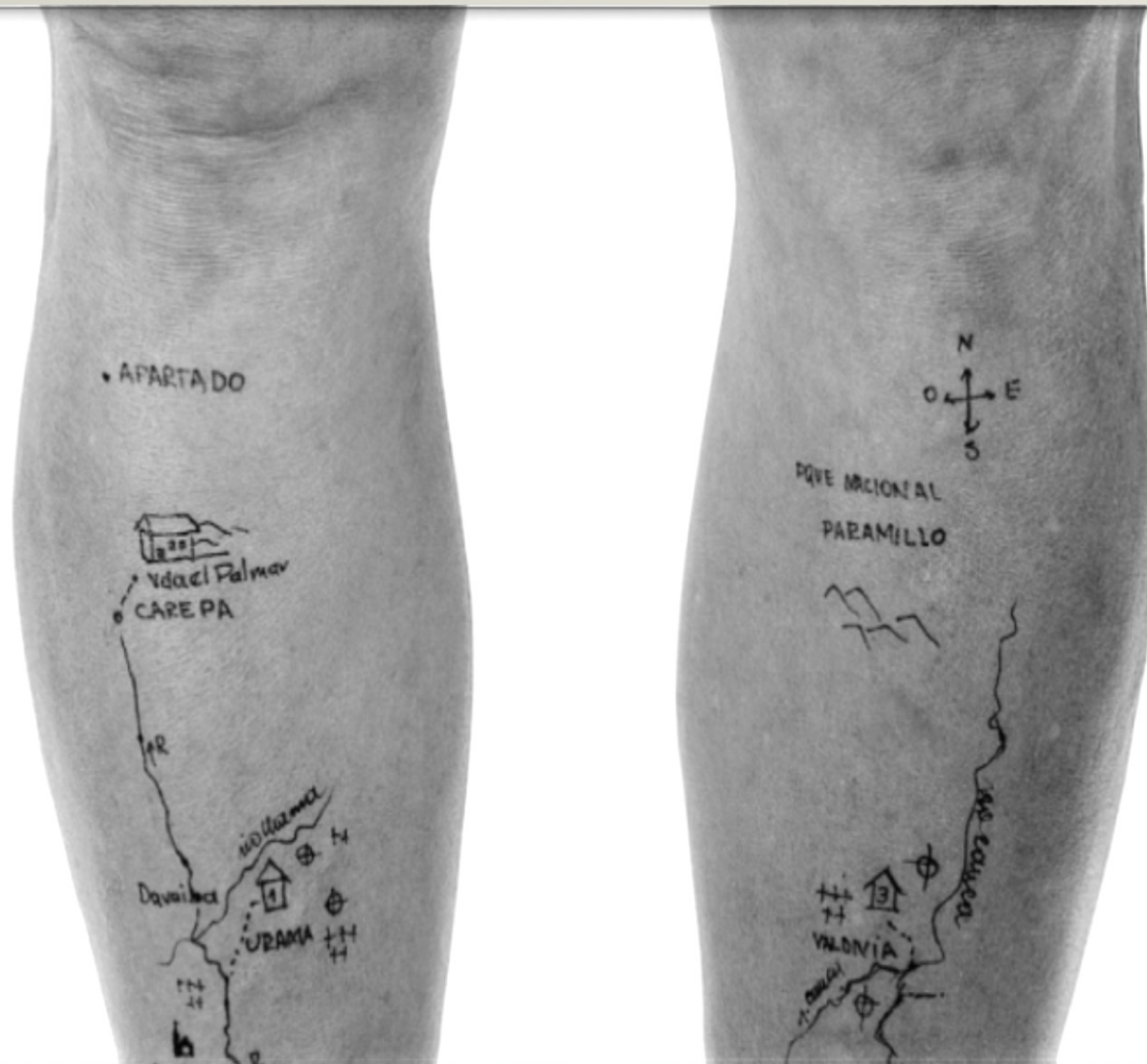
In the works I have mentioned, artists and victims work together to remap the national territory by giving center stage to a multiplicity of voices from heterogeneous regional, cultural and ideological backgrounds. In this way, the experience of the armed conflict becomes part of the country's official history and collective memory.



These works are displayed in public places such as the National Museum, the Plaza de Bolívar, churches, universities, and other sites associated with hegemonic institutions, although not exclusively. In this way, events happening in remote areas are being symbolically relocated to urban centers of power and integrated into the national life. The visible and the invisible Colombias are closer to resonating through art.

## Libia Posada *Signos cardinales* (Cardinal Points)





## **Erika Diettes, *Shrouds* •**

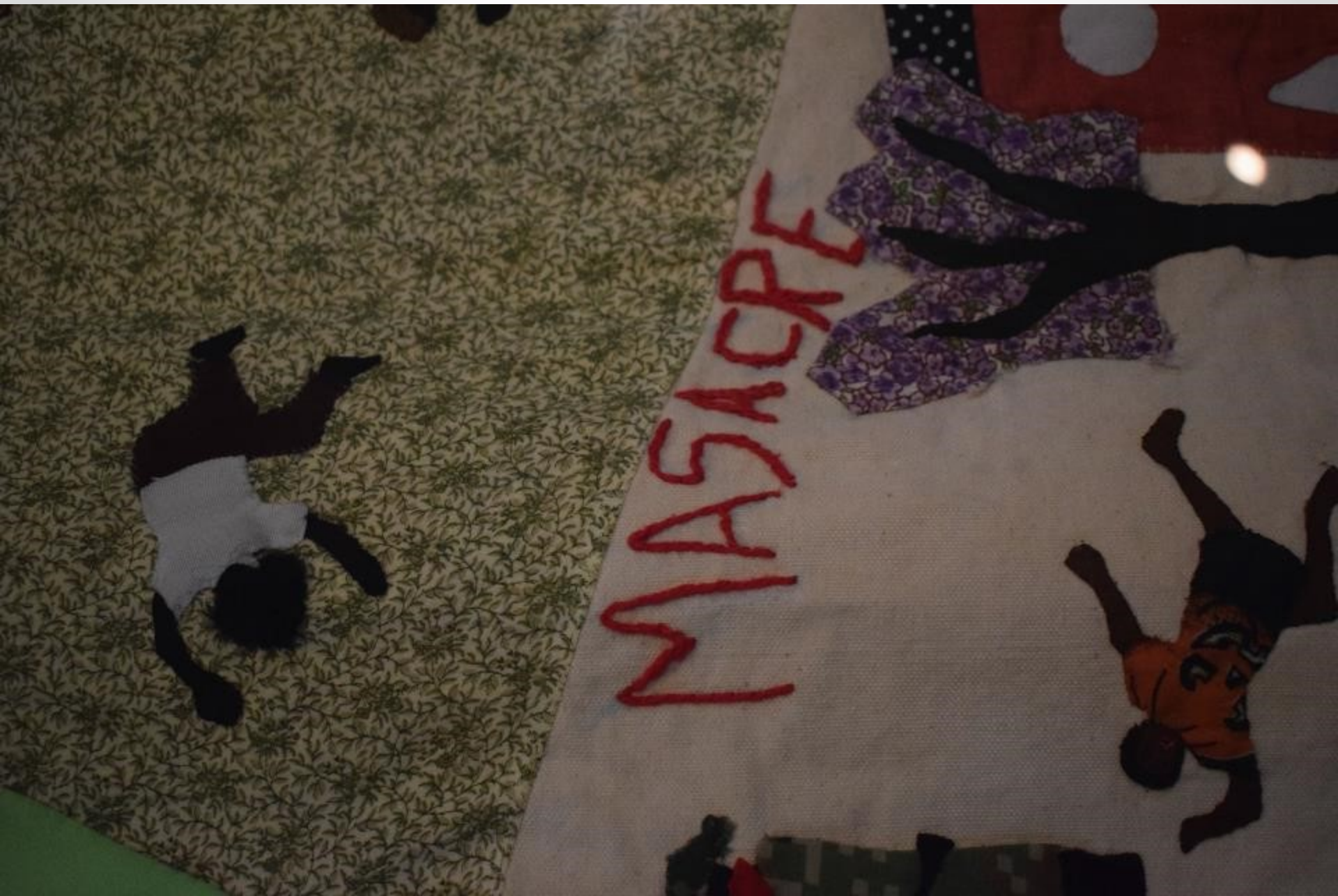
- <https://www.erikadiettes.com/sudarios/>
- <https://player.vimeo.com/video/234927394>

## Weavers from Mampuján















## Doris Salcedo, *Fragments*

















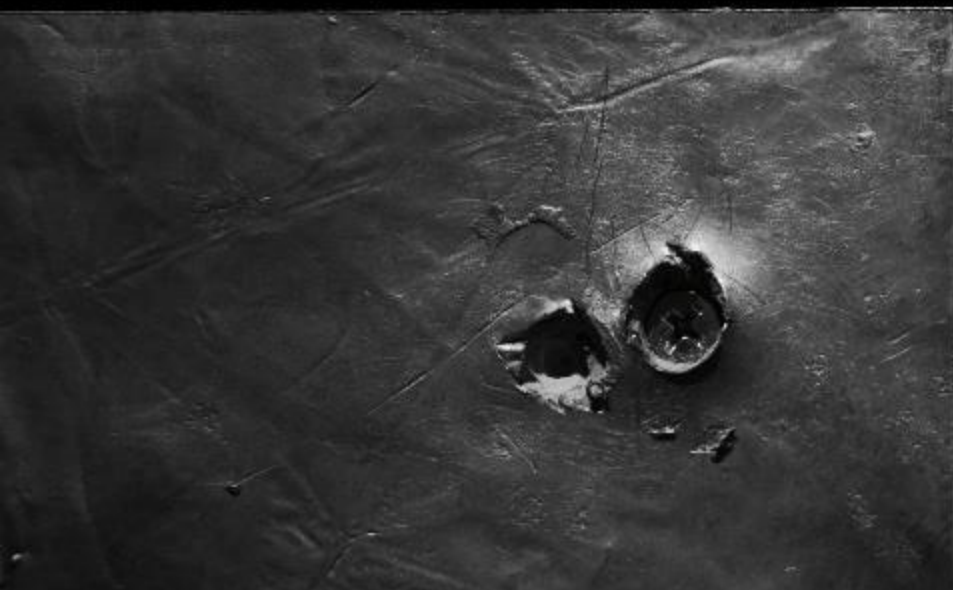












## Inty Maleywa (FARC member)







# Memories in Color



<https://www.google.com/search?q=memorias+a+color&tbm=isch&source=univ&sa=X&ved=2ahUKEwjiw6Gx2frgAhVpvFkKHWHECIEQsAR6BAgGEA>



## Felipe Bedoya, *NN*



# K-State Partnership

- K-State Spanish translation minor classes began working with *Memorias a Color* in Fall 2017
- Engagement Incentive Grant awarded to bring founder Edwin Rodríguez to campus and host an art exhibit and related events in October 2019
- Students translating video subtitles, survivor monologues, press coverage, descriptive text for art exhibit

# Democratic translation and empathy

- Collaborative translation process places value on many types of knowledge and abilities
  - Experiential knowledge
  - Academic knowledge
  - Writing abilities
  - Empathy– understand and convey emotional impact
- Synergistic effect of a diverse translation team

# Collaborative Process

- ❑ Groups of 2 each translate a portion of the project
  - ❑ When possible, form groups with one native speaker of each language
- ❑ Another group suggests revisions and the translators decide whether/how to incorporate them
- ❑ The class reads all the translations out loud and discusses ideas for revisions
- ❑ Example: monologue, a survivor's reflection on memory, art, and peace and reconciliation



Decidimos darle otro color a la historia.



We decided to give another look on history.



We decided to paint history a different color.

Nunca se es tarde para empezar. Aquella tarde estaba sentado junto a mi fusil, oleadas de calor y en la tierra sonidos de avalancha. Lo arrasó todo, casi todo. Un niño que se aferraba a la copa de un árbol como se aferraban tantos que de rodillas imploraban... se aferraban a la vida. Descolgué mi fusil, subí por él, entonces era yo su vida. Soy Giovanni Mena, ex integrante del frente 36 de las FARC, y todo lo que con ello implique. Es verdad que después de la catástrofe viene la calma. Decidí iniciar una nueva vida, como civil, como cualquier ser humano que pide otra oportunidad. Yo un secuestrador estaba ahí de pie sin saber qué hacer. Yo, un secuestrador, estaba ahí queriendo cambiar. Toqué varias puertas pidiendo trabajo. Cuando abrió la puerta lo vi a los ojos. Era él. Aquel campesino que tuve enfrente. Ese mismo que retuve. Ese mismo que secuestré. La avalancha no solo se llevó la totalidad de ISTMINA-Chocó, También en mí se llevó esa sed de guerra. Esa guerra absurda y sin sentido. Yo, ahí, en su casa fue una persona. Me sentía una persona. Y recordaba el niño aferrado a las ramas verdes. Un verde que me devolvió la esperanza. Hoy soy el mayordomo de la finca del señor que me abrió la puerta aquella tarde y decidió perdonar. Decidimos darle otro color a la historia.

It's never too late to start. That afternoon I was sitting next to my rifle. I could feel the stifling heat and hear the sounds of an avalanche coming from the ground. It destroyed everything, almost everything. A child in a tree holding on for dear life, like many others on their knees begging to live. I lowered my rifle, I climbed up to get him, I was his lifeline. I am Giovanni Mena, a former member of the 36th Front of the Revolutionary Armed Forces of Colombia, and everything it implies. It's true that after the storm the flowers bloom. I decided to start a new life, as a citizen, like any other human being asking for a second chance. I, a kidnapper, was standing there not knowing what to do. I, a kidnapper, was there wanting to change. I knocked on several doors asking for a job. When he opened the door, I looked him in the eye. It was him. That farmer I had encountered. That same one I held prisoner. That same one I kidnapped. The avalanche not only took the entire town of Istmina in Chocó, it also took away my thirst for war. That absurd and meaningless war. There, at his house, I was a person. I felt like a human being. And I remembered the boy clinging to the green branches. A green that made me feel hopeful again. Today I am the head caretaker of the property of the man who opened the door for me that afternoon and decided to forgive me. We decided to paint history a different color.

